



**Romy Hawatt,
Business consultant,
SAE Institute**

<http://www.sae.edu/>

Romy has many years' experience in the Gulf and has recently negotiated the establishment in Kuwait of SAE Institute, the world's largest creative media educator. The business is carried out under an exclusive territory licence arrangement with a local partner. SAE Kuwait was officially opened in 2007.

Romy Hawatt says fads come and go but truly innovative products and services that are seen to have a 'quirky edge' tend to increase the chances of successful market penetration in a place like Kuwait.

'Kuwaitis have a naturally strong entrepreneurial streak and are traditionally good traders with years of historical exposure dealing with different people & products. Typically, they are exposed to numerous people and offerings of sometimes similar products and services and usually end up with a better over-all picture of the market and products than the people and companies that make and sell them.

'In recent years there's been a focus on the youth market. It's a burgeoning market.

'Kuwaitis are always seeking out new, innovative ways of doing things, and they recognize that the understanding of creative technologies is a conduit to better communications as well as being the communications tools of the future.'

Romy Hawatt warns companies against a 'hit-and-run' business approach.

'Kuwaitis want to see that you have a presence and that you are staying around, ie that you are there for the long haul to maintain and service your product.

'A common mistake that some Australian businesses make is that they present as a 'Jack of all trades', which can convey the impression that they are not focused or stable and this can set an alarm off in the Kuwaiti mind.

'The Kuwaitis are suspicious of the motives of those who turn up with something to sell. The market is very small and if you get burnt, word travels quickly.

'Finding the right or wrong local partner is paramount to success or failure. Everyone in Kuwait wants to do business but it pays not to be overly impressed by the wealth of the first person you meet.

'You should do the background research. Ask around the market. Austrade, the Chamber of Commerce and the local Embassy may be able to help, but you should be prepared and resourced to visit many people and generally pound the pavement yourself also.

'If there's anything I would do differently, I would put even more research and effort into finding the strongest and most supportive partner.'

Romy Hawatt says some businesses have greater success entering the Kuwaiti market through licensing or franchise arrangements, rather than trying to set up owned and operated ventures themselves.

'The brand is important. The well-known US franchise brands are going gangbusters.

'Kuwaitis don't like to be told what they need. A good approach is to let it be known you are seeking assistance, and you generally find they are willing to help.

'Don't tell them what they need. Ask what you can do for them.'

'When you go to a country like Kuwait, it is best to throw all your pre-conceived ideas away and start with a fresh and open mind, but be prepared for bumps in the road.

'Any Australian going into an Islamic country needs to be culturally aware, in the same way as any Australian going into any Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish community should be sensitive to customs and practices.'